



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH
*1102 SE Quince Street • PO Box 47990
Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

March 13, 2002

To: State Board of Health Members
From: Don Sloma, Executive Director
Re: Withdrawal of Clark County from the Southwest Washington Health District

Summary and Background:¹

The Honorable Judie Stanton, Chair, Clark County Commissioners, and Bill Baron, Clark County Administrator, will address the State Board of Health on plans to dissolve the Southwest Washington Health District on December 31, 2002.

The Southwest Washington Health District is governed by a ten-member Board of Health. The Board comprises elected officials, including county commissioners and city officials representing Clark and Skamania counties and their cities and towns. The District has a 2002 budget of more than \$13 million and serves a population of 362,000 people.

Public health services have been provided to southwest Washington citizens since 1929. The Clark County Commissioners adopted a resolution to form a "district" board of health in 1945. In 1951, Skamania County joined with the district to become the Clark-Skamania Health District. The district became the Southwest Washington Health District in 1970 with the addition of Klickitat County. Klickitat County withdrew from the district in 1997 to form its own public health department.

In February 2002, the Clark County Commissioners announced their decision to reorganize health services by dissolving the health district in January 2003 and by planning immediately for Clark County to provide to its residents those services currently provided by the Southwest Washington Health District.

The Board of Health, which oversees the Southwest Washington Health District, and the Board of Clark County Commissioners agreed that strategic planning for the health district will focus on cost-effective service delivery in Clark County.

The Board of County Commissioners expressed a need to explore options for the county to deliver health services with greater economy and efficiency. Though the health district receives funding from federal and state sources, along with fee for service, some funding is provided by the county.

"In light of the voters' repeated call to limit taxes and to streamline government services, we feel compelled to look at new ways for meeting public and environmental health obligations for our region," said Judie Stanton, who chairs the Board of Clark County Commissioners.



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The Southwest Washington Health District Board of Health agreed to spend at least six months developing a transition plan to address the needs of Clark and Skamania counties.

“It is critical that we respond to budget tightening at both the state and local levels,” said Mary Kufeldt-Antle, a Camas city council member who chairs the Board of Health for the district. We are hopeful that a greater consolidation of services will result in greater efficiencies throughout the counties.”

The withdrawal of a county from a health district is governed by RCW 70.46.090, which states,

“Any county may withdraw from membership in said health district any time after it has been within the district for a period of two years, but no withdrawal shall be effective except at the end of the calendar year in which the county gives at least six months' notice of its intention to withdraw at the end of the calendar year. No withdrawal shall entitle any member to a refund of any moneys paid to the district nor relieve it of any obligations to pay to the district all sums for which it obligated itself due and owing by it to the district for the year at the end of which the withdrawal is to be effective. Any county which withdraws from membership in said health district shall immediately establish a health department or provide health services which shall meet the standards for health services promulgated by the state board of health. No local health department may be deemed to provide adequate public health services unless there is at least one full time professionally trained and qualified physician as set forth in RCW 70.05.050.”

The state Department of Health has been in contact with county officials and public health leaders in the Southwest Washington Health District and has been assisting in the transition.

Recommended Board Action:

This is an informational briefing to update the Board on changes in local public health organization in response to changing social, economic and political conditions. No Board action is recommended at this time.

ⁱ Thanks to Julie Grimm, Southwest Washington Health District, for her assistance in preparing this background.